

The Physician Leadership Imperative

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Why Physician Leadership Matters

For healthcare organizations to deliver better outcomes and create long-term growth, they must position themselves as the best provider to meet their communities' growing and increasingly diverse care needs. Doing so without clinical transformation is challenging, which is why the valuable insights and perspectives of physician leadership are essential for success.

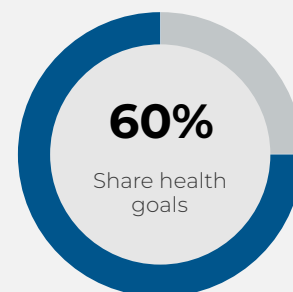
Physician leaders understand the industry's top priority: patients.

Physicians spend more time caring for — and getting to know — patients than administrators or other executives do, which gives the physician a unique and valuable point of view on what is needed to build trust in the patient-provider relationship. In a leadership position, physicians bring that patient-centered perspective to the business side of healthcare, ensuring organizational decisions are made with the patients' best interests in mind. This enhances patient engagement in their care, which improves quality and lowers cost.

Physician leaders have more credibility with employees.

Physicians are the de facto leaders in the clinical environment, which gives them an advantage in communicating with — and influencing — other employees. Because of their experience on the front lines, physician leaders are more likely to earn trust and credibility across the organization, making them ideal agents of change.

Huron's consumer research shows **more than half** of consumers with health goals share them with their providers.



Physician leaders can use their influence to educate on best practices, gain support for organizational change and increase accountability.

Transforming Physicians Into Effective Leaders

Clinical performance, though a strong indicator of competence, is not necessarily an indicator of leadership competence. Many highly skilled and accomplished physicians move into leadership positions by default, sometimes setting into motion the challenges organizations experience when leaders are unprepared or ill-equipped for a leadership role. For physicians to become leaders in more than title, they must develop essential leadership skills, just as they developed the clinical skills of a doctor.

Effective leadership requires effective development.

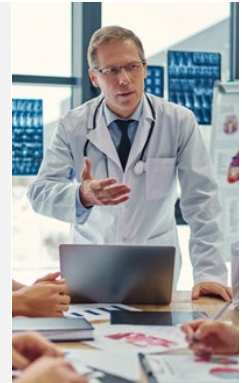
Healthcare organizations need influential and transformational physicians to lead organizational change. Physicians who embrace change and support the organization's vision for the future are best suited to fill essential leadership positions. Organizations need to provide robust leadership development to prepare them for success in a leadership role.

Development depends on environment.

A health system's culture has a major impact on leadership development; no matter how good the learning development program, physician leaders can still fail if their environments are not conducive to learning or do not support them on their journey. The organization must understand the biggest challenges physician leaders face and create cultures that mitigate or alleviate these challenges.

To be successful today and in the future, healthcare organizations must harness the power of physician leadership. With their consumer-centered foundational skills and their experience as care providers, physician leaders are key to driving significant clinical transformation, if given effective training and the right environment.

Learning development programs should provide physicians the skills they need to align goals and people, build robust teams, encourage cultural transformation and instill a deep sense of shared accountability.



Challenge: Too heavy a workload, not enough time

Effect: The physician is overwhelmed and feels behind.

Solution: Breaking goals down into smaller sprints with reasonable timelines helps to take the weight off of the physician's shoulders while they are training.

Challenge: Spending too much time in transition

Effect: The physician splits their time between being a physician and being an executive, meaning they can't fully dedicate themselves to performing either to the best of their ability.

Solution: Complementary teams that share the workload help clear the way for physicians to fully transition.

Challenge: Perceptions from other, nonphysician leaders

Effect: Because they don't have the same background and experience as nonclinical executives, the physician can feel like an outsider.

Solution: Ask physicians to weigh in on decisions prior to making changes that will impact workflow, practice environment and processes.



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